
Information Management and Coordination: The Way Ahead

By

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Two challenges confront the mine action community in their attempts to manage and use information: the difficulties accessing accurate, reliable, and timely landmine information, and dealing with the incongruent forms in which that information is often found and managed.

Recognizing these challenges as serious obstacles to effective mine action, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) asked the Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) at James Madison University (JMU) to convene a workshop in April, 2000. The goal of the meeting was to establish a consensus within the global mine action community as to the parameters of establishing an effective means to coordinate efforts to collect, manage and use information. Recognizing that such parameters could only become clear by establishing an open dialogue among key players within the community, DSCA brought together a host of international demining organizations to do just that. Officials from the United Nations, the European Commission, and the U.S. State Department were asked to co-chair the event. Their task was to shape the consensual concerns of the participants into discrete issues with next steps clearly defined and pointing to the way ahead.



Conference co-chairs (left to right) Jim Lawrence, U.S. Global Humanitarian Demining Office, James Prudhomme, UNMAS and Dr. Alois Sieber, EC Joint Research Centre

Two and a half days of presentations and discussion yielded six issues that all in attendance agreed must be addressed. Taken together, these six issues outline the steps that must be taken in order for a coordinated information exchange to be accepted and more importantly, to benefit those involved its collection, management, and use.

The six issues are:

- Managing mine action information.
- Creation of a spatial data clearinghouse for mine action.
- Information standards.
- Information management training.
- Research and development technology and information exchange.
- Information sharing.

Each of the organizations represented at the workshop had the opportunity to “sign on” to one or several of these issues in either a lead or supporting role as the identified next steps are executed. In keeping with the U.S. Department of Defense mission in humanitarian demining, the MAIC agreed to lend its support (under the auspices of DSCA) to three of the six issues: managing mine action information; creation of a spatial data clearinghouse for mine action; and information standards.



James Prudhomme, UNMAS, and Major Pete Aldwinkle, U.S. Army Engineer School.

The first issue, managing mine action information, is framed around a central question: Is it possible for many systems to exist simultaneously without hindering the exchange of information, and if not, is there a need for a unified information exchange platform? In order to answer this question it was determined that it is necessary to conduct an inventory of information systems. It was suggested that having a full inventory of the information management systems currently in use within the global mine action community would be helpful. The MAIC offered to work in cooperation with United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in the creation of such an inventory. It is believed that the inventory of systems will provide the basis for a more complete understanding of how they are being used and the nature of the database structure for the information that is being collected. This inventory should be completed by mid-year 2001.

The second issue, creation of a spatial data clearinghouse, was established due to the consensus that there is a benefit in having a site which can provide initial information for virtually all organizations involved in humanitarian mine action in their quest for maps, geographical information and spatial data products.

The participants agreed with the MAIC proposal to establish a geographic information system (GIS) working group convened under the aegis of UNMAS. Using the MAIC feasibility study for creating a spatial data clearinghouse and other input, this working group would be immediately tasked with providing a next steps plan of action while identifying other players/partners to participate in the effort. Furthermore, the MAIC agreed to develop an inventory and complete a mine action GIS users' survey to identify gaps in the available mapping and spatial data products and services relevant to mine action. This work is currently underway.



Left to Right: Dave Armitt, UNMIK, Steve Feller, UNMAS, and Laurence Desvignes, ICRC.

The third issue, concerning information standards, came about because of the consensus that most facets of information collection and dissemination are often unevenly implemented within

the mine action community. Problems such as incomplete and out of date statistical and survey data, quality assurance at the collection level, inconsistent terminology, and duplicative efforts, all hinder the effective use of information. In keeping with a process already in place for establishing international standards for mine action, UNMAS will promulgate mine action information standards. The MAIC agreed to continue lending its support to this process, in particular where it requires information dissemination. Among other activities, this will be done by adding the information to the MAIC maintained website: <http://www.mineclearancestandards.org/>

For more information about these three, or any of the issues generated at the workshop, contact the MAIC at maic@jmu.edu, call (540) 568-2718, or visit our web site at <http://maic.jmu.edu> where a complete copy of the official proceedings may be obtained.

About the Author

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